THIRD SECTION

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A FREEHAND TALK ABOUT THE STAGE AND STAGE FOLK

By Matthew White, Jr.

Robert Edeson, as he appears in his new play Ranson's Folly. PHOTO BY SCHLOSS

Scene from the first act of the Robert Edeson play Ranson's Folly. BYRON PHOTO

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George Ade, the playwright who has contributed largely to the Savage success

Otis Skinner starring jointly with Ada Rehan. PHOTO BY BAKER ART GALLERY

Sandol Milliken, leading woman with Robert Edeson. PHOTO BY SCHLOSS

Ada Rehan, starring jointly with Otis Skinner. PHOTO BY SARONY

News of the Plays and Players, and Some Peeps Into Greenroom History of Interest to the Public.

COINCIDENCES in connection with the Iroquois fire in Chicago continue to turn up. The "Theater Magazine" for January, issued almost on the day the fire occurred, contained an article on theater conflagrations that must have been written at least thirty days ahead. And away over in England I unearthed the subjoined almost prophetic utterance, from the "London Stage" for November 26 last:

"Theatrical Chicago has recently received a shock, consequent upon reports issued by the authorities, who were investigating the case of a new theater, which had been built in disregard of the provisions of the building act of that city. It now appears that out of the thirty-six theaters in the Western metropolis, only seven are of fire-proof construction. The report says that practically every theater in Chicago is built in direct violation of the building ordinances."

Speaking of London, I am wondering what our managers can find in Drury Lane's present pantomime for use over here next winter. For in "Humpty Dumpty" they have appropriated the following American ideas: The Scarecrow and the "Sammy" song from the "Wizard of Oz," the Tree of Truth from "The Runaways," and "In the Pale Moonlight," the pretty octette number interpolated over here last year in "Mr. Blue Beard," and which was being sung in Chicago at the moment the awful catastrophe occurred.

For the rest, the piece de resistance in stage pictures of "Humpty Dumpty" seems to be a scene under the sea, called The City of Coral. Marie George, an American actress, formerly of the Casino, is principal girl in the pantomime.

Ada Rehan and Otis Skinner.

A very cordial welcome was extended to Ada Rehan and Otis Skinner on their reappearance in New York, as the advance guard of the united shows, to borrow a circus term, which is to be followed up next season by Sothern and Julia Marlowe, and possibly later by Hackett and Mary Mannering.

Miss Rehan's term as queen of comedy at Daly's was measured by just a score of years, beginning with her appearance there in 1879, in the theater's first season, as Nellie Beers, in the curtain raiser to "Newport," called "Love's Young Dream," and ending with her sleep-walking role in the English melodrama, "The Great Ruby," which was running at the house in June of the year 1899, which saw the famous manager's sudden death.

Her first Shakespearean role was Mistress Ford in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," in 1886, and the next Katherine in "Taming of the Shrew," her greatest success, perhaps. The play was put on about the middle of January, 1887, and ran until the end of April. Her third Shakespearean appearance was the next year as Helena in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and her introduction as Rosalind took place December 17, 1889, her Lady Teazle in "The School for Scandal" following twelve months later.

Her first Bard of Avon failure occurred with the offering of "Love's Labor Lost," when she was the Princess of France, but was redeemed two years later by a triumph as Viola in "Twelfth Night," which London indorsed as heartily as had New York.

After Mr. Daly's death Miss Rehan did not act for nearly a year, when she made a brief tour in some of her old parts. The next winter she essayed the title role in Paul Kester's "Sweet Nell of Old Drury," but Miss Crosman had already skimmed all the cream off that character for us in America, and the engagement soon closed. Her present season with Mr. Skinner is her first appearance since.

Otis Skinner was last seen in New York at Hammerstein's Victoria two years ago as Lanciotto, the misshapen hero in the George H. Boker version of "Francesca da Rimini." Marcia Van Dresser, now one of the flower maidens in "Parsifal," was the Francesca. Last season he presented the dramatized novel "Lazarre," which never reached the metropolis at all.

Shakespeare Redivivus.

Mr. Skinner began his stage career with juvenile roles in the Lawrence Barrett company and then passed into the Daly stock. This was in the middle eighties, and among the plays in which he appeared at the Comedie Francaise of America, as Daly's was sometimes called, were "A Wooden Spoon," "Love on Crutches," "A Night Off" (as Harry Damask), "The Merry Wives" (as Mr. Page), "The Taming of the Shrew" (as Lucentio), and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (as Lysander).

The revivals of the present Skinner and Rehan engagement include, besides the "Shrew," a week each of "The Merchant of Venice" and "The School for Scandal," and are made with the Augustin Daly appointments and versions. George Clarke, of the earliest Daly days, is in the cast. Mr. Clarke appeared in the first piece Mr. Daly brought out in a theater of his own—the old Fifth Avenue, on the site of the present Madison Square—a Robertson comedy called "Play," produced August 16, 1869.

In the good old days of 1897, when plays at the Empire ran for six months instead of three weeks, the leading actors in them were apt to grow weary as hot weather came on, and were quite ready to relinquish their roles to understudies.

This was the case with Viola Allen and William Faversham when "Under the Red Robe" was the bill, and June found the play still stretching out its term, which had begun in the previous December. Miss Allen's place was taken by Ida Conquest, while the dueling Gil de Berault fell to Robert Edeson, who had been in the Empire's very first play, "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

So well did he do the Frenchman in "Under the Red Robe" that Charles Frohman made him the Scottish minister the next season in Maude Adams' first starring venture.

Of his start in stage life Mr. Edeson wrote me himself as follows in 1896: "My going on the stage was quite accidental. I was engaged in the office of the Park Theater, Brooklyn. Colonel Sinn, the manager, was producing a play called 'Fascination,' and on the Friday previous received word that one of the smaller members of the cast was missing; purely on the spur of the moment he suggested my filling the vacant place and I consented, though never having been on the stage before.

"Of my first performance I remember very little. However, I believe I was not offensive, and was therefore allowed to play the week out. The following season, not being able to come to terms with Colonel Sinn, I determined to adopt the stage as a profession, and was fortunate enough to secure the juvenile part in a small traveling company playing Daly's 'A Night Off.'

"Then came 'The Dark Secret,' in which the villains and myself were the only ones allowed to go unwashed in the tank."

Mr. Edeson scored his really big hit with Amelia Bingham in perhaps the most popular play Clyde Fitch ever wrote, "The Climbers." The next season Mr. Edeson resigned twice from the Bingham company, the first time because he thought the role in the contemplated "Hearts Aflame" was beneath his dignity, and again because he couldn't have the part of the stuttering man in "Lady Margaret," which Miss Bingham assigned to Ferdinand Gottschalk.

The following autumn Edeson made a big strike starring in the Richard Harding Davis play, "Soldiers of Fortune," which lasted him two seasons. Now, after a brief trial last fall of another piece, in which he enacted a minister, he has returned to Davis and hopes to duplicate in "Ransons Folly" the long-term triumph of that other semi-military play with "Fortune" in its title.

Sandol Milliken has left the weepy Sarita with Maude Adams in "The Pretty Sister of Jose" to assist Mr. Edeson. Miss Milliken comes of a Southern family, and first had her thoughts turned stageward when, crossing the ocean at the age of ten, she met Wilson Barrett on the steamer. She treasured up the impressions made at the time, and when she had reached the age of doing up her hair and letting down her gowns, made bold to call one day at the theater in Washington where the Augustin Daly company was playing.

The stage was set for the "Shrew," and while waiting for the manager she was reprimanded by one of his aides for sitting on the "props."

"Will your family allow you to engage with me?" inquired Mr. Daly, after he had decided to give her a trial.

"I didn't think you'd take me, so I didn't tell them," was Miss Milliken's naive reply.

Her first part was the page to Richman in the "Twelfth Night," and later she had one of the minor characters in "The Geisha." After that she became soubrette for a season at the Murray Hill at $40 a week, and next she did a Gladys Wallis part with Crane in his failure, "Governor Peter Stuyvesant."

In 1901 she was Jefferson De Angelis' fourth leading woman in "A Royal Rogue," and the following year made a hit in the taking musical comedy, "The Liberty Belles." Last winter she had the name part in Clyde Fitch's brief-lived adaptation from the German, "The Bird in the Cage."

The Savage Successes.

Undoubtedly the biggest man in New York theatricals the past year has been Henry W. Savage, of Boston, with his "Sultan of Sulu" and "The Prince of Pilsen," playing against each other to record-breaking business, followed up by good receipts from "Peggy from Paris" and another ten-strike with "The County Chairman." Mr. Savage is by no means a stranger to the stageland of the metropolis.

He arrived here first on the afternoon of Christmas Day, 1897, with his Castle Square Opera Company, presenting "The Queen's Lace Handkerchief," at the American Theater. House managers in Gotham, hearing of his big strike with the famous musical organization in Boston and Philadelphia, had long been trying to induce him to try his fortunes in Manhattan. One deal, with a manager who is more noted for building theaters than for his skill in directing them, was almost concluded, but the manager in question had so much to say about the manner of conducting the company that Mr. Savage put on his hat. "My dear sir," he said, "I don't see what need you have of the Castle Square people. Why don't you form a company of your own?"

Finally Mr. Savage settled on the American, and for three seasons he did a splendid business there, bringing to the front such clever comedians as Frank Moulan and Raymond Hitchcock, and prima donnas like Grace Golden, the late Lizzie Nacnichol, Yvonne de Treville (now singing abroad), and Maud Lillian Berri.

The enterprise was so successful, in fact, that there seemed to be no reason why it should not win out on still broader lines. A partnership was formed with Maurice Grau, and on October 1, 1900, the Metropolitan English Opera Company inaugurated a season at the Metropolitan Opera House with a performance of "Faust."

But the voices of the singers failed to fill the great auditorium—the hardest to sing in the world around—and although the orchestra chairs were scaled down to $2 each, the public did not seem to care to pay this to hear people they felt they could have heard at the American previously—and some of whom they had heard there—for $1.

The fall term was carried out at the Metropolitan as planned, but the company closed its road tour in Washington about New Year.

The outcome was a great disappointment to Mr. Savage, as the scheme was a particular pet of his, but happily he is a man of independent fortune, so he was able to stand the financial loss.

He centered his attention on his Castle Square troupes in the West, devoting special attention to Chicago and St. Louis.

The Ade Comedies.

While in Chicago he became interested in original musical talent there and after noting the success of "The Burgomaster," by Pixley and Luders, bought from them their next work, "King Dodo." This, his first essay in the musical comedy field, proved immensely remunerative, and he determined to try it again.

This time he fell in with no less a person than the fable man, George Ade, who thought the Philippines a good subject to juggle with to rag-time tunes.

"Go ahead," said Mr. Savage, "I'll pay the piper."

A young man who wouldn't want to emulate Mozart in writing undying melodies at the expense of ear tickling ones was found to provide the score, and "The Sultan of Sulu" resulted. This was brought out in Chicago last spring, proved a winner there, and in New York carried everything before it.

Meantime Pixley and Luders were ready with another venture, "The Prince of Pilsen," and this Mr. Savage put forward in Boston with no break in his chain of good luck.

And the end was not yet. George Ade became so fascinated with the new work that he turned out another book, found a new man for his composer, and the outcome Mr. Savage launched in Chicago in February as "Peggy From Paris." With this he made still another ten strike. Meantime his Castle Square Opera Company has been successfully touring the land, while "The Yankee Consul," soon to be heard in New York, is reaping a fortune in the provinces. Surely this is a wonderful record for a manager in a hard luck theatrical season like this.

A beauty of the Savage shows is the more equal division of the work than in the organizations with stars, where everything is made to revolve around the one hub.

And if that hub chances to be tedious to certain members of the audience, a tiresome evening is the result, and a report of the performance is given that is not likely to send any of that person's friends scurrying to the box office.

CASABIANCA UP TO DATE.

A group of commuters stood around the forward doors of the smoking cabin on a Pennsylvania Railroad ferryboat one morning last week as the craft chopped her way through the ice on the storm-swept river. It was a sight well worth looking at, but the morning was so bitterly cold that even the deckhands sought the shelter of the cabin. The only occupant of the lower deck was a lad, who pulled his soft hat around his ears and clung to the rail admiring the fury of the gale. Neither of the dozen or more men in the group looking at him had ever spoken to one another in their lives. Suddenly a young man, as if lost in thought, took his cigar from his lips and exclaimed:

The boy stood on the freezing deck

The others looked at him in astonishment, but one of them, as if to show his familiarity with the classics, continued:

Whence all but he had fled.

There was a general giggle, but the verse-making became contagious. Said a man with a big beard:

If he comes out another morn,

And this was followed up with

He ought to bring his sled

By a youth who looked like an office

He'll catch his death of cold that way,

Remarked a paternal looking old man.

He may be very ill,

Continued another.

The doctor then will get a job,

To the comment of a man who looked though he was one.

And dad will foot the bill,

Mournfully remarked a man who looked though he might have "been there."

Where is another fool like that?

Was the query of a man who had just joined the group.

Ah, echo answers where?

Said a Newark commuter.

By Jove, the kid has lost his hat,

Was the general chorus. Just then the door was pushed violently open and the youngster came in to finish his own sonnet with

Gee whizz, it's cold out there.

—New York Press.